

Auditors Report on the Statewide Voter Registration System

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The county auditors of Iowa have been working with people from the Iowa Secretary of State's office and with representatives from the voter registration system vendor, Saber Consulting, through most of 2005 to develop and install the statewide system required by HAVA.

Our concerns are as follows:

1. Iowa law states that effective 01-01-2006 no county shall purchase or maintain a separate voter registration system. While county auditors are reasonably comfortable with the functionality of the voter registration capabilities of the database, many are not comfortable that the election management capabilities of the system will be fully functional by the above date. Those counties with their own systems would like to run parallel until they are assured through direct experience that the I-VOTERS system is operational. To flip the switch to a system that is not thoroughly field-tested in real-life elections without the safety net of a known system could cause administrative issues for county auditors and potential damage to the public trust in the integrity of the election process.
2. The I-VOTERS system is projected to cost \$850,000 to \$1,000,000 annually for system maintenance and support, a cost that counties feel they cannot bear alone. Currently the state pays the annual cost for maintenance of the existing statewide voter registration database. Defining the partnership between the state and the counties with respect to ongoing the maintenance cost is a priority.
3. How will the system work in a general election with ninety-nine counties relying on Internet connectivity? All counties will be live and the system stress-tested, but this will not happen until early in 2006.

Comments from Ken Kline:

The initial state interpretation of HAVA was that the system was required to be a "top-down" system in which the data and program reside at the state and, therefore, one that relies on Internet connectivity. Subsequently, the Election Assistance Commission has interpreted HAVA to include a "bottom-up" system in which the data and program reside in each county, and in which the data could be copied daily to a central state repository. The reliance on Internet connectivity adds variables over which county auditors have little or no control, and I have concerns over how we will be able to conduct business if that connection is broken. If and when we do experience such problems, I would like to see a review of the legality, logistics, and cost of a redesign to a bottom-up system.

Comments from Marge Pitts:

First, the pilot counties and eventual users have fully cooperated with and worked very hard to assist in the implementation of I-VOTERS, and we need the cooperation of the legislature to fund the ongoing costs of the system. Second, I agree with the concern of expecting the statewide system to be functional on January 1st. Third, I understand the fears associated with reliance on the Internet for connectivity. However, I believe the cost of redesigning I-VOTERS would be huge. Possibly freeing the election management piece from voter registration would be easier, thereby allowing each county to administer these functions separately.